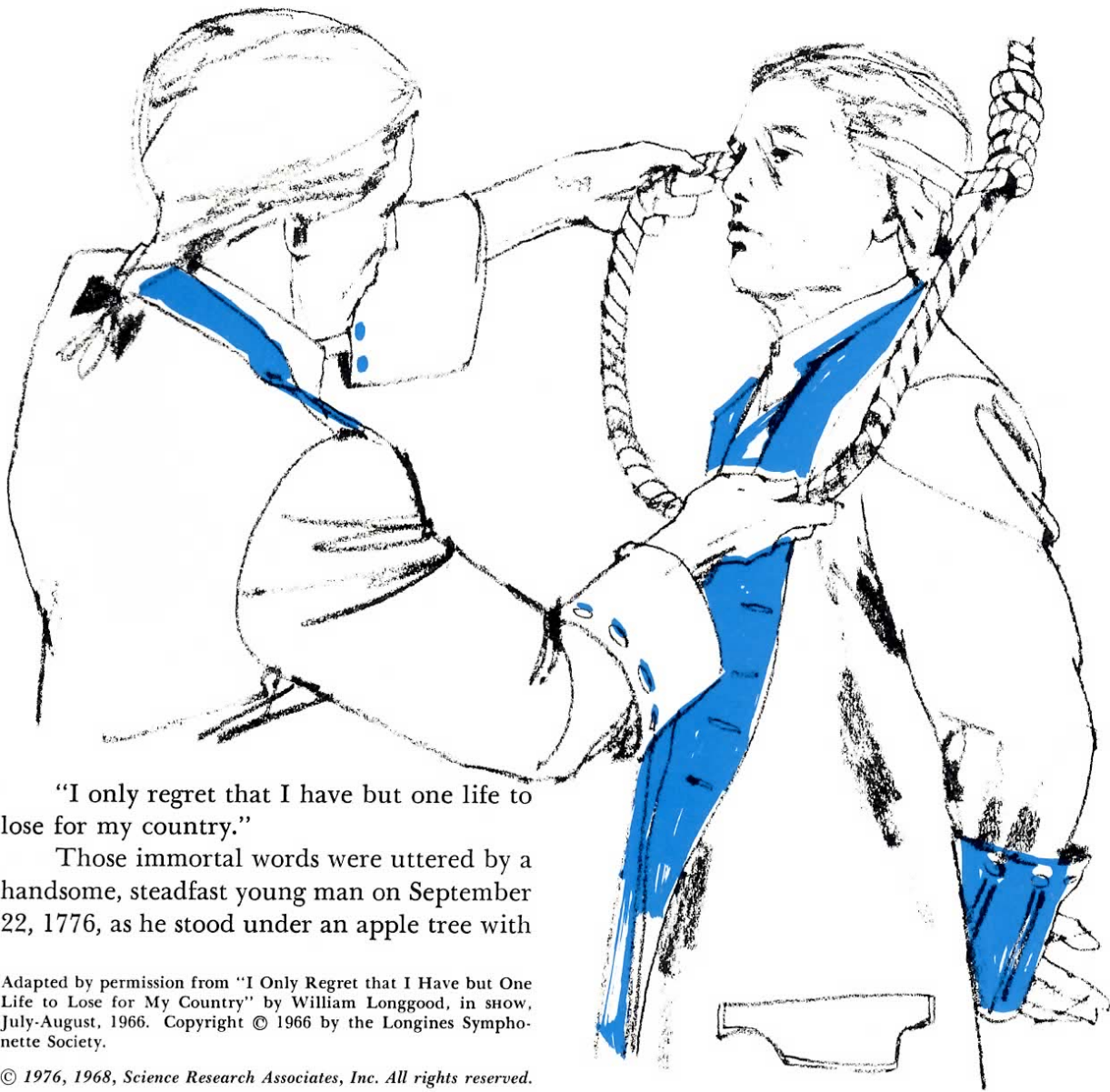


But One Life to Lose

by William Longgood



“I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.”

Those immortal words were uttered by a handsome, steadfast young man on September 22, 1776, as he stood under an apple tree with

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don it, but before that decision could be made it was necessary to know what the British plans were. The council resolved upon a desperate measure: to call for a volunteer to infiltrate the British lines on Long Island.

Hale was then a member of a select group known as Knowlton's Rangers. On September 14, Knowlton summoned a group of officers to his tent, outlined the project, and told how urgently Washington needed information.

On the first call no one volunteered, but on the second call one man stepped forward. Hale, still weak and shaken from a recent illness, said, "I will undertake it."

At eight o'clock the night of September 15, the young captain left the camp with two companions, disappearing into a deep fog that lay over the land. He was disguised as a Dutch schoolmaster, in a plain brown suit and a round, broad-brimmed hat.

The party reached Norwalk, Connecticut, about forty miles north of New York City, around noon the next day, and there Hale bade his friends farewell. They were to remain in Norwalk five days and then send a boat to pick him up early on September 21 at a designated point across Long Island Sound. He crossed the Sound on a small sloop and put ashore in Huntington Bay.

There is little information about his movements of the next few days. Apparently he ranged back and forth on Long Island, making drawings and collecting data, living by stealth, eluding patrols and guards, and sleeping in the open.

But the information he gathered was scanty and unsatisfactory. The most promising place to get what he was after was the

Cedars, a favorite tavern of British soldiers. Hale had avoided the place as too dangerous, but on his last night he decided to chance it. He mingled with the British soldiers, and then left shortly before day for the appointed place for his boarding of the boat that was to take him back. He worked his way cautiously toward the Sound, avoiding sentries and patrols, until finally he had almost reached his goal. Ahead he could see a boat with several men in it, moving toward the point of rendezvous.

Hale began to race eagerly toward the beach, but then pulled up suddenly. The boat was not the rescue vessel, but a barge loaded with British marines. He was captured and taken to the British ship *Halifax*, where he was searched. Beneath the inner soles of his shoes were found all his drawings and descriptions.

Taken before Lord Howe in New York City, Hale freely admitted his mission, but denied that he was a traitor, insisting that he did not look upon King George as his sovereign. Howe, without bothering with the formality of a trial, ordered the prisoner to be hanged at sunrise the next morning.

On that beautiful Sunday morning of September 22, Hale was escorted under heavy guard to his place of execution, and the noose was placed around his neck. When asked if he had any "last dying speech and confession," the twenty-one-year-old spy made a spirited speech. The part of it that has been preserved, to ring down through the ages, inspiring patriots for all time, was the memorable, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

CHECK YOUR READING

1. **The information that Hale had collected was**
 - A destroyed before his capture
 - B seized by the British
 - C forwarded to Washington too late
2. **At Yale, Nathan Hale was outstanding because of his**
 - A youthfulness
 - B intelligence
 - C Both A and B
3. **In New London, Hale worked as a**
 - A lawyer
 - B minister
 - C Neither A nor B
4. **As soon as he heard about Lexington and Concord, Hale**
 - A returned home
 - B joined the army
 - C rode to New York
5. **To persuade soldiers to stay in the army, Hale bribed them with**
 - A extra money
 - B special provisions
 - C easier jobs
6. **In comparison with the British in New York, the Americans were**
 - A greatly outnumbered
 - B poorly equipped
 - C Both A and B
7. **The Cedars was the place where**
 - A a boat was to meet Hale
 - B British soldiers often gathered
 - C Hale was put to death
8. **Hale's secret information was hidden in his**
 - A broad-brimmed hat
 - B inner soles
 - C overcoat pocket
9. **Hale admitted to Howe that he was a**
 - A spy
 - B traitor
 - C Both A and B
10. **Hale's famous words were spoken**
 - A upon his capture
 - B during his trial
 - C at his hanging